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## [Nortel](#) links Web-based document sharing and audio conferencing in new collaboration product; other market entries also noted

*Telecommuting Review*, Monmouth Junction; Oct 1998; [Anonymous](#);

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### Abstract:

Slowly but surely, vendors are working to turn the Web into a true business tool and not just a one-way information source. [Nortel](#), drawing on its broad telephony expertise, has just announced a product that enables multiple users to work collaboratively over the Internet. Two related products are also discussed.

### Full Text:

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#### [Headnote]

SUMMARY: Slowly but surely, vendors are working to turn the Web into a true business tool and not just a one-way information source. [Nortel](#), drawing on its broad telephony expertise, has just announced a product that enables multiple users to work collaboratively over the Internet. Two related products are also discussed.


Perhaps ten years ago, I started seeing videos produced by telephone companies in the US and elsewhere in which all kinds of realtime interaction over phone lines was promised. These slightly futuristic promotional videos described products and services that added tremendous capabilities-far beyond "video on demand" or online catalog shopping. These videos were tantalizing, but I never gave them much thought because the gap between the (then) current phone services and what was being described seemed too large to close.

Well, that gap is starting to close-and very quickly. One of the best examples is [Nortel](#) Internet Conferencing, just announced by the worldwide telecommunications equipment and solutions provider. The product enables Internet



service providers (ISPs) to deliver realtime audio conferencing and data collaboration from any Web page, and will be sold only to ISPs to help them broaden their services and compete more effectively.

Multiple users can all point their browsers at the same URL and not only watch but also participate in a Web-based presentation— and also have an audio link with other participants over their Internet connection.  Nortel says the product will work with most recent versions of the main browsers, and needs a connection at 28.8 kbps or better; higher— speed connections (e.g., ISDN, xDSL, or cable) won't affect the quality of the voice component but will cause screens to refresh faster when doing application sharing. The only additional equipment needed by individual users is a headset, according to  Nortel; the fact that a headset is needed for good sound quality is an indication that voice over IP simply doesn't have the clarity we are used to with the public switched telephone network.

The software—which is only needed by the ISP, not the individual users—creates a "public conference center" that is a focal point for scheduled conferences, and also provides pre-meeting (e.g., agenda, supporting documents) and post-meeting (e.g., conference archives) support. All participants log into the conference center and are visually identified on a conference roster; online voting and other interactive features are also available.

Pricing starts at less than \$10,000 for software leased to an ISP. The charges by the ISP to its customers will be set by the ISPs, though  Nortel is suggesting something in the range of \$100 per user per month for unlimited usage.



This product is designed as a truly interactive tool, not just a view-only solution. The goal is to enable dispersed work groups to view documents (or graphics, or video clips) at the same time and then collaborate via audio and by joint editing or design. It is definitely a step in the right direction in terms of further enabling remote workers to work together.




My only concern about it has nothing to do with  Nortel, but everything to do with the Internet, and it's the same kind of concern I had (and still have) about solutions that are ISDN-dependent: you are at the mercy of the quality of the telecommunications connection and the adequacy of the network. We all know that glitches tend to crop up fairly often in Web-based collaboration; the fact is, they crop up in Web-based anything.  Nortel's success with this product depends in large part on factors it can't control—not only the Internet, but the ISPs' technical competence as well.

For more details, visit the company's site at <[www.nortel.com/internetconferencing](http://www.nortel.com/internetconferencing)> or e— mail <[icinfo@nortel.com](mailto:icinfo@nortel.com)>.

## TWO MORE TOOLS TO GET TOGETHER

There are two other related products worth noting; neither is as well-developed as  Nortel's, but they belong on your radar screen as you track new developments to help facilitate remote work:

1.  AT&T's "Just4Me"(SM) Project—This is a development project <[www.just4me.att.net](http://www.just4me.att.net)> and does not appear to be commercially marketed. Here, in terms that only a company the size of  AT&T could use, is a description from the project Web site:

 AT&T is entering into a trial for exciting new  AT&T consumer calling capabilities that enable you to personally tailor your  AT&T calling experience. This project combines the power and quality of the AT&T Voice Network with the innovation of the Internet in a way that greatly enhances your daily communications.

You can use the features of the AT&T Just4Me project to call your friends and family\* using your computer and a telephone. Once connected, you can talk about the Web pages you share with them and even surf the Web together. You also have the ability to store frequently called phone numbers and launch individual and group calls quickly.

Your calling experience will be graphically personalized and you will have greater flexibility in sharing and interacting with individuals and communities of interest. You will be able to communicate and collaborate—Online and in Real Time!

[\* Ed. note: You can be sure that the people at  MCI, which has long promoted its "Friends and Family" longdistance calling plan, are delighted to have  AT&T give that term some coverage...]

When you sign up for a trial account, you get 100 minutes free and then the charge is 15 cents per minute per

called party. So, a ten-minute call to five other people would cost you \$7.50, plus whatever you're paying for Internet access. Full details about system requirements, billing terms, and more are available at the project site.

There are two main features of this application, according to the [AT&T](#) site:

[AT&T Click2Dial](#) lets you "launch and control calls during an active Internet connection. The feature enables you to use your computer and the Internet to initiate a phone call over the AT&T Voice Network to up to six people. A call management window provides you a visual display of all call activities: who is connected, call duration, session information, etc.

[AT&T Click2Dial+ Share](#) gives you the additional ability "to share a **co-browsing** experience. With this feature, information that you find of interest on the Web can be shared visually among the participants on the call to:

Exchange ideas

Jointly plan community activities (school, little league, scouts, fairs)

Jointly plan family outings or entertainment

Simply show off the snapshots from your last vacation or favorite family photos located on your personal home page.

To co-browse, the caller, serving as the leader, simply surfs the Internet; call participants will see each web page the leader visits. The caller can pass 'leadership' of the web-browsing to another participant at any time.

[Ed. note: in case you missed it, [AT&T](#) has just added another term to our techno-dictionaries: "**cobrowsing**." You heard it here first...]

In effect, [AT&T](#) has married what is known to be a big consumer demand for residential-based conference calling with the booming interest in the Internet—all you need to do is get everyone on the line at once, and you overlay a conference call on a shared Web browser, in effect. It is noteworthy that the four sample applications [AT&T](#) listed on its site are clearly consumer/ family in nature; while this product is in the same general arena as [Nortel's](#), it has not been designed with the range of features or with the business focus [Nortel's](#) has.

2. HipBONE Software's Co-navigator(TM) Service— This is described at the company's Web site [www.conavigator.com/main.jhtml](http://www.conavigator.com/main.jhtml) > as "a free service for surfing, shopping, and searching online together. Co-navigator allows two or more people to connect browsers and navigate the web together."

Co-Navigator is being positioned as both a consumer and a business application, as evidenced by these selections from the firm's list of possible reasons why you should "co-navigate"—and, yes, that's another new term for you to learn:

Search for apartments together! Potential roommates co-navigate Rent.net and Yahoo! Classifieds to find an apartment for rent in San Francisco.

Share your favorite stock ideas! Members of investment clubs are co-navigating their portfolios, showing their favorite stock picks and reviewing financial research together.

Listen to music together! Friends are co-navigating [CDNow](#) and Music Boulevard to sample music and actually buy CD's online together

Cyber-Date! Prospective couples have found each other in the HipBONE lobby and now go on 'cyber-dates' by surfing the web together with HipBONE Co-navigator..

Plan an entire wedding! From selecting the band, to catering, to even shopping for bridesmaid dresses, Fiancees are co-navigating online wedding sites to totally plan the big event..

Get a job! Recruiters are co-navigating job listings with potential employees.

Give presentations! Employees are using HipBONE Co-navigator to give department-wide presentations over the

Internet.

Provide online customer support! E-commerce companies see the potential of using HipBONE Co-navigator to provide online customer care.

If you go to the HipBONE site, you can try it for free with any other user you designate, or by meeting up with someone in the site's "lobby." The files you need are automatically downloaded to your computer. You'll note that this is essentially good chat software married with a Web "portal"- and that's why this service is free. You are given a menu of Web categories and sites to choose from, though you aren't limited to them.

## THE WEB AS MEETING GROUND

These three approaches to Web-based conferencing are more different than similar in approach, but more similar than different in intent. They all assume that people who aren't located together want to do something together-whether it's work (Nortel), gossip and trade photos (AT&T), or shop for products, services, or information (HipBONE). And they all rely on the Web which, as I noted before, has its pros and cons. The biggest difference among the three is that HipBONE is graphic-only; there is no audio component at this time. However, HipBONE is also the only one that's free.

You'd be wise to consider all three as emerging examples of how you can help your remote workers collaborate. As you'll see from the three sites, the products vary not only in terms of features and cost, but also in what I'll call "playfulness." Nortel's is, as might be expected for a business product, a more buttoned-down (though definitely not dull) site, while the other two are more inviting and in the case of HipBONE, a little frivolous. If we're going to make this Web-based collaboration work, and make people comfortable using it, I'd vote to keep and expand the playfulness. The intricacies of using the Web, figuring out arcane preferences-settings on browsers, and dealing with different telecommunications protocols will all benefit from a little bit of fun.

### [Footnote]

#### NOTE TO READERS:

This section includes general information on products and services that facilitate or are relevant to remote work. Any products and services mentioned by name are not being endorsed or recommended by Telecommuting Review.

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Knowledge-Based Intelligent Engineering Systems and Allied Technologies, 20 Proceedings. Fourth International Conference on , Volume: 1 , 2000

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Multimedia and Expo, 2000. ICME 2000. 2000 IEEE International Conference

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